

A Note on Archaeological Work at Ponui Island

by V. F. FISHER, Auckland Museum.

From a knowledge of Ponui Island extending over many years Motunau Bay at the southern end was selected as a likely area for archaeological investigation. The reasons for this selection were, firstly, that it contained the only large area of flat land, and, secondly, the largest stream on the island flowed through the flat. In addition there was evidence that headlands in the vicinity had been fortified and the large bay with extensive mudflats offered good possibilities for shell fish and flounder. Further out a deep channel provided a well known fishing ground for larger fish, of which snapper and kingfish were commonly caught.

Having obtained permission from the owner, Mr. F. Chamberlin, Dr. Robert Bell, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma, United States, his wife, Mrs. Virginia Bell and the writer commenced to excavate a small area of the bay in February, 1956.

One or two test pits were first dug some distance apart. Following this preliminary investigation, it was decided to commence work close to the fence, near the mouth of the stream, on the western side of the bay. Each square excavated was five by five feet and this was followed throughout the operation. This first visit lasted over a period of three weeks.

In 1957 and again in 1959 assisted by a small team of students from Ardmore Teachers' College under Mr. A. H. McNaughton, Mrs. McNaughton and Mr. H. J. Whitwell, work was continued for two periods both lasting one week. Dr. Bell and Mrs Bell had in the meantime returned home to Oklahoma. On all three visits the area excavated was continuous and a total of forty-six squares was excavated.

All the material, together with notes, plus information on the early history of the island, was handed over to Miss M. Nicholls, who first wrote a preliminary report published in Volume 6 of the New Zealand Archaeological Association's Newsletter, and then after further study produced the final report.

In conclusion acknowledgements must be made to many persons who helped and assisted.

First to Mr. F. Chamberlin, who not only granted permission to excavate, but who with his wife and family gave much willing help in a variety of ways; to Dr. R. E. Bell for much expert advice and assistance. May I also express appreciation of the work of Mr. and Mrs. A. H. McNaughton, and Mr. H. J. Whitwell, lecturers at Ardmore Teachers' College, and the teams of students under their care, who all worked with interest and enthusiasm. Finally a very special word of thanks to Miss M. Nicholls for her study of the material, and all the hard work that led to the production of the report which follows my brief statement.